

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 43

(By Senators Chafin, Cole, Williams, Plymale, Kessler (Mr. President), McCabe, Wells, Yost, Jenkins, Barnes, Beach, Blair, Boley, Cann, Carmichael, Cookman, Edgell, Facemire, Fitzsimmons, Green, D. Hall, M. Hall, Kirkendoll, Laird, Miller, Nohe, Palumbo, Prezioso, Snyder, Stollings, Sypolt, Tucker, Unger and Walters)

Memorializing the life and public service of a favored son, James Howard "Buck" Harless.

Whereas, James Howard "Buck" Harless was born October 14, 1919, in Taplin, West Virginia, to Bessie Brown Harless and her husband Pearly J. Harless. Soon after his birth, his mother died of pneumonia, and he was taken in and raised by his mother's sister Rosa and her husband George Erastis "Ras" Ellis of Gilbert; and

Whereas, When James Howard "Buck" Harless was young, he was given the nickname "Buster" and townspeople referred to him as Buster Ellis. It was later that he came to be known as Buck Harless. Throughout his life he cherished the love and support he received from Ras and Rosa Ellis, whom he considered his mom; and

Whereas, James Howard "Buck" Harless attended Gilbert public schools and graduated high school in 1937. During that time his first real job was working for George Crago, who operated a garage and wrecker service in Gilbert. He learned from George Crago a business philosophy of trust, honor and commitment to excellence through hard work and dedication to customer satisfaction; and

1 Whereas, As a child of the Great Depression, James Howard
2 "Buck" Harless yearned to attend college but was unable to fulfill
3 that dream for lack of money; and

4 Whereas, On February 25, 1939, James Howard "Buck" Harless
5 eloped with his high school sweetheart June Montgomery, the
6 beginning of a marriage that spanned sixty years and produced two
7 children, Larry Joe and Judy. In the early years of their marriage
8 he worked at Red Jacket Coal Corporation, first as a laborer and
9 later in its engineering department. June Harless died in April,
10 1999; and

11 Whereas, In 1947 James Howard "Buck" Harless was offered an
12 opportunity to own a one-third interest in a small sawmill that was
13 doomed to failure without proper management and operation. He
14 dedicated himself to the task, bought out his partners in short
15 order and made a success of the operation. This was the beginning
16 of what was to become International Industries, Inc., a collection
17 of diverse companies with a worldwide imprint; and

18 Whereas, On January 23, 1955, a day that began with his
19 feeling utterly alone and lost ended in tranquility and a sense of
20 redemption when James Howard "Buck" Harless opened his heart to the
21 Lord at the Gilbert Presbyterian Church. No other event had such
22 a profound, lasting impact on his life; and

23 Whereas, In 1966 Georgia Pacific Corporation purchased his
24 lumber operations, making James Howard "Buck" Harless a
25 multimillionaire at the age of forty-seven. Rather than retire, he
26 acted on the suggestion of his son Larry, who worked with his

1 father, to operate sawmills in South America. Against substantial
2 odds, they succeeded where multinational companies failed; and

3 Whereas, In the 1970s, along with friends - among them Fred
4 Shewey and Frank Allara - James Howard "Buck" Harless entered the
5 coal business in southern West Virginia. The timing was fortuitous
6 because the price of coal soared to record highs, ensuring business
7 success and adding greatly to his personal wealth. He also added
8 multi-state manufacturing and real estate businesses to his
9 enterprise family; and

10 Whereas, Even though he oversaw wide-ranging business
11 interests, James Howard "Buck" Harless served his church, community
12 and state with dedication and commitment. He served on numerous
13 boards and civic organizations. He supported West Virginia
14 University and Marshall University in substantial ways. He
15 provided many with the opportunity to attend college. While his
16 philanthropic activities are well noted, the breadth and depth are
17 known to but a few because he did not seek favor through his
18 actions, but rather he tried to make a difference and use his
19 wealth to serve the greater good; and

20 Whereas, Former President George W. Bush credited James Howard
21 "Buck" Harless with his election to the nation's highest office,
22 because Buck cast the two hundred seventieth electoral vote,
23 providing the margin of victory in the Electoral College; and

24 Whereas, Over the years, James Howard "Buck" Harless amassed
25 a legion of friends, all of whom he held dearly in his heart. He
26 considered friendship the most valuable thing that a person could

1 have, and he felt more blessed with friends than with monetary
2 wealth; and

3 Whereas, James Howard "Buck" Harless passed away peacefully on
4 January 1, 2014, with his wife Hallie by his side and surrounded by
5 family; and

6 Whereas, From a life of humble beginnings in rural West
7 Virginia to the ends of the world, it is fitting to recognize and
8 honor James Howard "Buck" Harless for his many community and
9 philanthropic achievements and his dedication to his church, his
10 community and his state; therefore, be it

11 *Resolved by the Senate:*

12 That the Senate hereby memorializes the life public service of
13 a favored son, James Howard "Buck" Harless; and, be it

14 *Further Resolved,* That the Senate expresses its sincere
15 gratitude to James Howard "Buck" Harless for his everlasting
16 contributions to the State of West Virginia; and, be it

17 *Further Resolved,* That the Clerk is hereby directed to forward
18 a copy of this resolution to the family of James Howard "Buck"
19 Harless, including his wife Hallie of Gilbert; daughter Judith Ann
20 Burgess of Murfreesboro, Tennessee; half-brothers Jimmy Harless and
21 Earl Harless; stepsons Ryan Mollette and Brett Mollette; four
22 grandchildren: James Harless II, and his wife Sjon Harless, of
23 Flamingo Beach, Costa Rica and Mobile, Alabama, Maurice Kirk "M.
24 K." Harless, and his wife Paula Harless, of Mobile, Alabama,
25 Beverly Burgess of Shelbyville, Tennessee, and Stephanie Burgess
26 Palmer, and her husband Robert "Robby" Palmer, of Mobile, Alabama;

1 and six great-grandchildren: James Howard "Trip" III, Hope,
2 Chelsea, Kitty, Chase and Hannah.